

China to participate in investigation of disaster

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A crane lifts a section of the fuselage from TransAsia Airways Flight GE235 from the Keelung River in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: CNA

The Executive Yuan yesterday said China would take part in the investigation of the crash of TransAsia Airways (台灣航空) Flight GE235, adding that the move is “in accordance with international conventions.”

Executive Yuan spokesperson Sun Lih-chyun (孫立群) confirmed that China is to participate in the investigation and the government would ask the Mainland Affairs Council to pay extra attention to the issue of jurisdiction to prevent it being overstepped.

A Cabinet official said that according to the Convention on International Civil Aviation’s Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation standards, the nation in which the aircraft is registered, the nations where its passengers were from and the nation that built or manufactured the aircraft are all entitled to take part in an investigation.

The official added that a “cross-strait cooperation agreement on flight safety and airworthiness directive” is under negotiation, although not yet signed, and the basic framework of the agreement would be used for the two nations to work on the investigation.

As Flight GE235 was carrying 31 Chinese passengers, Aviation Safety Council Executive

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Director Thomas Wang (王國材) said that China said it wanted to participate in the investigation.

“We have contacted Chinese government officials and informed them that the council can help them secure documents to enter the nation. However, Beijing has yet to indicate who and how many officials would come,” he said, adding that this would be the first time Chinese officials would join the council in an aircraft accident investigation.

China’s Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson Ma Xiaoguang (馬曉光) said in Beijing that there exists a communication mechanism between the two nations for inviting participation in investigations should major aircraft accidents occur.

Ma said that Taiwan has issued an invitation and confirmed that China’s civil aviation department would send personnel to assist in the investigation, adding that the group would be coming to Taiwan for a civil aviation “mini cross-strait meeting” — a term that puts emphasis on its non-governmental nature.

Some netizens cast doubt on the government’s consent to Chinese participation. A netizen with the username “Karsho” said on the Professional Technology Temple (PTT) Web site — the nation’s largest online bulletin board — that according to Article 26 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation: “In the event of an accident to an aircraft of a contracting state occurring in the territory of another contracting state ... the state in which the accident occurs will institute an inquiry into the circumstances of the accident, in accordance, so far as its laws permit, with the procedure which may be recommended by the International Civil Aviation Organization.”

Insofar as Taiwan is both the nation where the accident occurred and the nation in which the aircraft was registered, “Taiwan should have exclusive jurisdiction over the investigation ‘according to the regulations’ and should not have China overstep like this,” Karsho said.

“We sent our people to Japan, with the consent of the Japanese government for the China Airlines (華航) crash in Nagoya in 1994 to gain knowledge of the events,” Karsho said. “As investigation is part of the authority of the nation where the accident occurred, Taiwan at the time could only wait for Japan’s official investigation report.”

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Other netizens questioned whether Taiwan had been allowed to participate in the investigation of the Qiandao Lake (千岛湖) incident in China's Zhejiang Province in 1994, and said that China might take this as an opportunity to act as if it was sovereign over Taiwan.

“Why do we want a nation that follows the rule of one man to participate in the investigation of a nation abiding by the rule of law?” a netizen asked.

Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Lee Kun-tse (李俊毅) said that according to the international convention and cross-strait agreements, China could send a specialist to Taiwan to obtain information about what happened, to undertake the task of identifying the people killed and gain access to the investigation report, but it has no right to participate in the judicial investigation.

Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Lo Shu-lei (罗淑蕾) asked the public not to “politicize everything” and said it is understandable that China wants to know more as the accident involves its citizens.

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